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**OBITUARIES**

# Dr. James Melius, Advocate for Workers' Health, Dies at 69

By RICHARD SANDOMIR JAN. 10, 2018

Dr. James Melius, an international expert on workplace medicine who advised the sponsors of a federal law that authorized billions of dollars for the medical care of first responders and others after the World Trade Center attacks in 2001, died on Jan. 1 at his home in Copake Falls, N.Y. He was 69.

His son Jeremy said the cause was cardiac arrest.

In the years before passage of the law in 2010, Dr. Melius gave forceful testimony to congressional committees that drew on his decades of work for government agencies and labor organizations.

He urged that Congress pass a comprehensive program to relieve the economic hardships of those who had developed — and would develop — respiratory diseases, cancer and other illnesses caused by exposure to toxins like asbestos and alkaline dust after the terrorist attack of Sept. 11, 2001.

He also lobbied to help workers who had lost their jobs and medical insurance and had found their medical claims being challenged by workers' compensation.

When he testified on Capitol Hill in 2009, Dr. Melius cited the case of Leon Heyward, an inspector for the city's Department of Consumer Affairs, who had

helped evacuate disabled co-workers from ground zero and later learned he had sarcoidosis, a respiratory disease.

"His disease got worse," Dr. Melius said in his 2009 testimony. "He had to stop working. He was denied workers' compensation. He struggled to get by and needed to move to a smaller apartment. He later developed lymphoma and died last year."

An autopsy later ruled Mr. Heyward's death a 9/11-related homicide, Dr. Melius said.

"There are many more people," he added, "who have suffered, who have become ill, and we need a system in place to provide not only the medical programs we have, but also the assistance to them, economic assistance."

Dr. Melius also helped devise the medical treatment and monitoring program that the legislation created. (It also applies to those affected by the Sept. 11 attack on the Pentagon and the crash of the hijacked plane in Shanksville, Pa.)

"He was a rock to lean on," Representative Carolyn B. Maloney, a New York Democrat who was the lead House sponsor of the law, said in a telephone interview. "He was the principal force for building the science that 9/11 caused these illnesses and deaths."

The law was named for James Zadroga, a New York City police detective whose death in 2006 from respiratory failure was linked to the dust he inhaled during rescue and recovery work at the World Trade Center.

James Malcolm Melius was born on June 16, 1948, in Great Barrington, Mass., and grew up across the New York border in Copake Falls. His father, Norman, was a farmer, and his mother, the former Helen Hodgkins, was a first-grade teacher.

After graduating from Brown University and the University of Illinois School of Medicine, he received a doctorate in epidemiology from the University of Illinois School of Public Health.

A residency in occupational medicine at Cook County Hospital started him on a series of positions dedicated to safeguarding the welfare of workers. He worked in

Cincinnati at the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health; and in Albany for the New York State Department of Health, the Center to Protect Workers' Rights and the New York State Laborers' Union, which represents mainly construction workers.

"He had an early sense of wanting to do good and remain connected with working-class people," Jeremy Melius said in a phone interview. "He had a strong sense of service."

In the aftermath of an explosion and fire in 1980 at a hazardous chemical storage site in Elizabeth, N.J., Dr. Melius, by then chief of the occupational safety institute's hazard evaluations branch, coordinated the agency's response.

"He flew in and got N.I.O.S.H. a trailer to do medical evaluations of the firefighters," Richard Duffy, a former official of the International Association of Fire Fighters, said in an interview. "It was one of the first times that firefighters were evaluated after a major incident, and that continues today."

Four years later, Dr. Melius was part of a small group of American experts who traveled to Bhopal, India, to help the medical authorities there in their investigation of the long-term health effects of a poison-gas leak at a Union Carbide plant that killed thousands. He noted that exposure to the gas would cause irreversible damage to the lungs of 50,000 survivors.

Dr. Philip J. Landrigan, the dean for global health at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York, said Dr. Melius had created innovative health and safety programs in the construction trades as well as assisting states and Canadian provinces on legislation that presumes that the dangerous work of firefighters is a major factor when they are disabled or killed by heart and lung disease and cancer.

"I think it's fair to say that Jim Melius was the senior medical officer in the entire American labor movement," said Dr. Landrigan, a longtime colleague who collaborated with him on the 9/11 medical program at Mount Sinai.

In addition to his son, Dr. Melius is survived by his wife, the former Melanie Boice, and another son, Ehren.

In testimony to a House committee in 2007, Dr. Melius said the government had failed to ensure the health of workers at ground zero. After the initial rescue phase, he said, further recovery work should have been halted pending implementation of a comprehensive safety plan that had been adopted.

In the future, he said, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration should be involved in providing a comprehensive assessment of a site's hazards, enforcing federal protection standards, and mandating that "no work at that site should go forward without O.S.H.A.'s certification that people are being appropriately protected during that work."

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